Statement

The United Nations has long recognized that the imagination, ideals and energies of young people are vital for the continuing development of the societies in which they live. The Member States of the United Nations acknowledged this in 1965 when they endorsed the Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples.

The World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) provides a policy framework and practical guidelines for national action and international support to improve the situation of young people. It contains proposals for action, aiming at fostering conditions and mechanisms to promote improved well-being and livelihoods among young people. The WPAY focuses in particular on measures to strengthen national capacities in the field of youth and to increase the quality and quantity of opportunities available to young people for full, effective and constructive participation in society.

In 1995, the world youth population — defined by the United Nations as the age cohort 15–24 — was estimated to be 1.03 billion, or 18 per cent of the total world population. The majority of the world youth population (84 per cent in 1995) lives in developing countries. This figure is projected to increase to 89 per cent by 2025. The difficult circumstances that people experience in many developing countries are often even more difficult for young people because of limited opportunities for education and training, viable employment and health and social services, and because of a growing incidence of substance abuse and juvenile delinquency. Many developing countries are also experiencing unprecedented rates of rural-urban migration by young people. Apart from the statistical definition of the term "youth" mentioned above, the meaning of the term "youth" varies in different societies around the world. Definitions of youth have changed continuously in response to fluctuating political, economic and sociocultural circumstances.

Young people in industrialized countries comprise a relatively smaller proportion of the total population because of generally lower birth rates and longer life expectancy. They comprise a social group that faces particular problems and uncertainties regarding its future, problems that relate in part to limited opportunities for appropriate employment. Young people in all countries are both a major human resource for development and key agents for social change, economic development and technological innovation. Their imagination, ideals, considerable energies and vision are essential for the continuing development of the societies in which they live. Thus, there is special need for new impetus to be given to the design and implementation of youth policies and programmes at all levels. The ways in which the challenges and potentials of young people are addressed by policy will influence current social and economic conditions and the well-being and livelihood of future generations.

Implementation of the Programme of Action requires the full enjoyment by young people of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, and also requires that Governments take effective action against violations of these rights and freedoms and promote non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, with full respect for various religious and ethical values, cultural backgrounds and philosophical convictions of their young people, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security and participation of all young women and men.

Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations are called upon to assist young people from developing countries to obtain education and training at all levels in developed as well as in developing countries, as well as to participate in mutual academic exchanges among developing countries. Some

important actions should be based on: 1. Improving the level of basic education, skill training and literacy among youth; 2. Promoting mutual respect and understanding and the ideals of peace, solidarity and tolerance among youth; 3. Training for enterprise programmes; 4. Infrastructure for training youth workers and youth leaders; 5. Making farming more rewarding and life in agricultural areas more attractive.

The capacity for progress of our societies is based, among other elements, on their capacity to incorporate the contribution and responsibility of youth in the building and designing of the future. In addition to their intellectual contribution and their ability to mobilize support, they bring unique perspectives that need to be taken into account.

Governments should develop domestic policies to ensure that ICT is fully and appropriately integrated into education and training at all levels, including in the development of curricula, teacher training and institutional administration and management, as well as in support of the concept of lifelong learning. Governments, with the support of the international community, should promote and encourage local knowledge systems and locally produced content in media and communications, support the development of a wide range of ICT-based programmes in local languages, as appropriate, with content relevant to different groups of young persons, especially young women, and build the capacity of girls and women to develop ICT.

Governments, in collaboration with relevant actors in the information society, should ensure that young people are equipped with knowledge and skills to use ICT appropriately, including the capacity to analyse and treat information in creative and innovative ways, to share their expertise and to participate fully in the information society. Efforts should be made to provide special training courses for in-school and out-of-school youth to enable them to become conversant with ICT and to facilitate their use of such technologies.

It is imperative that young people continue to have access to evidence and skills-based, youth-specific HIV education to enable them to avoid high-risk behaviour. In some regions youth, especially girls, play a key role in caring for HIV/AIDS patients or their orphans. To ensure that young caregivers stay in school, build their skills and have the chance to generate an income, Governments should provide economic and social support to families that rely on young caregivers as well as support for improving home- and community-based care. Governments should ensure that prevention of HIV infection is the mainstay of national, regional and international responses to the pandemic, and should therefore commit themselves to intensifying efforts to ensure that a wide range of prevention programmes which take into account local circumstances, ethics and cultural values are available in all countries, in particular the most affected countries.

Protecting youth under age 18 from direct involvement in armed conflict Governments should ensure that children benefit from an early age from education about values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life in order to enable them to resolve any dispute peacefully and in a spirit of respect for human dignity, with tolerance and non-discrimination. Governments should promote a culture of peace, tolerance and dialogue, including in both formal and non-formal education. Governments should consider, as a matter of priority, the ratification and effective implementation of the Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999 (Convention No. 182) of the International Labour Organization.

Implementation of the Programme of Action for youth offers important opportunities to expand technical and cultural exchanges among young people through new partnerships in both the public and private sectors; to identify and test

improved ways to leverage public resources, in partnership with the non-governmental and private sectors, to further Programme priorities; and to encourage and jointly plan innovative approaches to critical issues concerning youth.